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SUBJECT: JAMAICA: ELECTION CAMPAIGN ROUND-UP NUMBER TWO

REF: (A) KINGSTON 1126 (201159Z JUL 07)(NOTAL)

(B) KINGSTON 1144 (2329029Z JUL 07)(NOTAL)

Summary

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1.(SBU) In this second round-up of election-related developments:

-- Dissolution of Parliament

-- Jamaica's Closest Election in Decades?

-- Violent Incidents Continue

-- Fears of Violence May Favor Ruling Party by Suppressing Voter Turnout

-- Debates Announced

-- Report on Controversial Cellular Licensing due July 30

End Summary.

Parliament to be Dissolved in Advance of Elections

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2.(SBU) Prime Minister (PM) Portia Simpson Miller (PSM) has sent an official request to Governor-General Professor Kenneth Hall to dissolve the Jamaican Parliament effective July 25 in advance of the August 27 general elections. The chief parliamentary counsel will prepare the Proclamation for the Dissolution of Parliament for signature and gazetting by midnight, July 25. At that time, a proclamation for the holding of elections on August 27 will be issued.

Jamaica's Closest National Election in Decades?

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3.(SBU) The favorability ratings of parliamentary candidates of both the ruling People's National Party (PNP) and the opposition Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) have improved, according to the latest Bill Johnson poll commissioned by the Gleaner newspaper and released July 25. With a purported error margin of three percent, Johnson's latest survey claims that only four points separate the favorability ratings of both parties' respective candidates: PNP 40 percent, JLP 36 percent. (Comment: Recent polls by Johnson and others have met with widespread skepticism because of doubts as to their objectivity. Post continues to believe that:  
-- the overall popular vote will be quite close;  
-- in approximately 25 of Jamaica's 60 parliamentary districts, the individual races are too close to call;  
-- much may transpire between now and Aug. 27.  
Further analysis will be provided via septels.  
End Comment.)

Violent Incidents Continue:  
Opposition JLP Calls for Calm; Ruling PNP Strangely Silent

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4.(SBU) Sanjay Ebanks, the Office Manager for Opposition JLP (Jamaica Labour Party) parliamentary candidate Joan Gordon-Webley in the South-East St. Andrew constituency, who was shot as he was locking-up the office the evening of July 19 (reftel A), died of his wounds the next day. This constituency includes the volatile areas of Woodford Park, Mountain View, Saunders Ave., and Jacques Rd. Earlier, Gordon-Webley had reported that her motorcade had come under fire. PNP (People's National Party) General Secretary Donald Buchanan had dismissed her report as a "false accusation."

5.(SBU) The murder of Ebanks has provoked a strong response from JLP leader Bruce Golding, who has written a letter to Prime Minister (PM) Portia Simpson Miller (PSM) threatening to withdraw from any further bipartisan talks involving Buchanan. Golding has called Buchanan "indisciplined" and "uncontrollable," and has demanded that PSM "reign him in." Golding also warned JLP members not to seek retaliation, noting "every retaliation invokes a retaliation to that retaliation and there is no point in going that way." Golding and JLP Shadow Minister for National Security Derrick Smith have asked Police Commissioner Lucius Thomas to establish a temporary security post in the community.

6.(SBU) For her part, the PNP Member of Parliament (MP) for South-East St. Andrew, Maxine Henry-Wilson, has expressed her condolences to Ebanks' relatives and stated: "the recent flare-up of violence in this constituency is not only most distressing, but demands the strongest possible condemnation." Meanwhile, Buchanan's comments on the murder have been limited to calling for a police investigation and suggesting that the murder may not have been politically motivated. PSM has not commented. (Note: Because of

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the "cheek-by-jowl" proximity and dense concentration of both PNP and JLP supporters, Mountain View, Saunders Ave., and Jacques Rd. comprise a particularly volatile area of Kingston. Even in normal times, the area is prone to non-political violent crime contributing to Jamaica's high murder rate. South-East St. Andrew, and other high-profile constituencies, will be the subjects of septels.)

7.(SBU) Thus far, the JLP appears to have received the brunt of the political violence; however, it hasn't been limited to JLP supporters. A reporter from Nationwide News Network (NNN) claims to have received death threats following Buchanan's criticism of NNN as biased against the PNP. NNN claims the PNP withdrew its advertisements from the network following its broadcast of a recent poll favorable to the JLP, and subsequent criticism by Buchanan.

Fears of Violence May Favor Ruling PNP

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8.(SBU) Jamaica has a history of political violence, which peaked in the 1980 election but since has diminished; unfortunately, the current unusually long campaign appears to risk breaking this downward trend. Two factors may explain the risk:

(A) As much as a third of the electorate has not committed to either party. Jamaican political history suggests that these "undecideds" usually tend to vote 2-to-1 in favor of the party in opposition.

(B) In years of violence, undecided (or not strongly committed) voters tend to stay home. With recent polls consistently showing a close race, and the ruling PNP's lead over the JLP smaller than the percent of the population that has not committed to either party, suppression of voter turn-out thus can only benefit the PNP.

National Debates Announced

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9.(SBU) The Jamaican Debates Commission (JDC) has announced the dates for national debates between the ruling PNP and the opposition JLP:

-- The first of the three debates will be held on August 8 and will feature PNP Minister for National Security Dr. Peter Phillips facing JLP Shadow Minister for Health and Environment Dr. Ken Baugh focusing on social issues such as crime and health.

-- The second will be held on August 10 and will feature the PNP's Dr. Omar Davies (Minister of Finance and Planning) and the JLP's Shadow Minister for Finance and Public Service Audley Shaw focusing on economic issues.

-- The final debate will be on August 11 and will feature PM Portia Simpson-Miller (PSM) squaring off against opposition JLP leader Bruce Golding.

10.(SBU) Poloff and DCM recently met with Matt Dippell, Deputy Director for Latin America and the Caribbean at the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, and Martin Slutsky, Executive Producer, Commission on Presidential Debates. Both organizations are advising the JDC on producing the three debates. The JDC sponsored the country's first live, televised debates in 2002, during which the then candidates PM P.J. Patterson (PNP) and Opposition Leader Edward Seaga (JLP) shook hands - thus sending a powerful message of peace to the electorate. Dippell and Slutsky reported that this year's debate will see the removal of sponsor advertising, reduction in the number of commercials, and reduced fees for television air time (Note: Jamaican television does not provide free air time for debates or other political events. End Note).

11.(SBU) The Aug. 11 debate between PSM and Golding has been the subject of much anticipation and speculation. The two have remarkably different styles, with PSM exuding charisma and frequently alluding to God and "destiny," and Golding projecting a much more technocratic and businesslike image. PSM has only participated in one other debate: the 1992 PNP intra-party debate for leadership. Both friend and foe alike judged PSM's performance against P.J. Patterson a resounding failure. Since that time, she has tended to avoid unscripted moments with the media. Her disappointing performance, however, is well-known and she may very well survive the debate due to low expectations from the electorate. In private discussions with Ambassador, Golding has observed that PSM need only give the media one memorable sound-bite to look good, while he must perform well over the entire course of the debate.

Report on Controversial Cellular Licensing due July 30  
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12.(SBU) Meanwhile, Minister of Information Donald Buchanan has announced that a report on recent controversial sales of cellular

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telephone licenses by Minister of Industry, Technology, Energy, and Commerce Philip Paulwell (Reftel B) will be delivered to Cabinet on July 30. Alleged mismanagement of Jamaica's Universal Access Fund (UAF) is only the latest imbroglio involving Paulwell, a close advisor of PSM, and may give political ammunition to the opposition JLP during the campaign.  
JOHNSON